The Old South Facing the Machine

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NOT long ago a critical note upon the industrialization of the South was sounded by the editor of *The Edenton News* of Edenton, N. C. "A mill owned by Northern capital, employing 1,000 persons, is no advantage to a town," he declared in his newspaper. "The workers are paid $12 a week, work twelve hours a day. They have only $12 a week to spend, which means that they do not contribute to the prosperity of the town. The money that the mill makes for the owners is spent, not in Edenton, but at Palm Beach, Newport, Paris. The mill workers are not home-owners, they do not pay taxes. Yet they have numerous children to be educated at public expense. Many mills have been offered exemption from taxes, which means that they contribute nothing to the expense of maintaining fire, police and sanitary facilities. These mills wear out their labor early, and so the town acquires an increasing burden in worn-out poor. Ninety per cent of the charitable cases in Edenton are in the mill village." The editor concluded by stating that ten good farmers who own their own homes are more of an asset to the community than 200 workers in the mills.

Obviously, a little drama of industrialization has unfolded in the community of Edenton—a drama that is being enacted today in many other industrial theatres in the South, a section of the nation which rightly calls itself the new industrial frontier. Behind the curtain-speech of the critical editor one surveys the several acts which have conduced to the present climax; he sees a drowsy Southern town, which for a hundred years has had its agriculture as its chief asset, suddenly awakening to its industrial possibilities; he sees an aggressive chamber of commerce offering inducements to Northern capital, perhaps a monetary bonus, surely a remission of taxes for five, ten or twenty years; he sees the community holding out its countryside as a labor reservoir from which workers can be drawn to the mills; he sees the farmer of Anglo-Saxon stock deserting the field for the factory, and finally he sees the city of Edenton, now that the first intoxication of its industrialization is over, beginning to suspect that, in its eagerness to create taxable properties and fat payrolls at the expense of diversified agriculture, it has somewhere overshot the mark.

The South, despite an occasional cry of protest, is thoroughly committed to a new industrial program. In the industrial future it confidently expects the machine to create for it the prosperity, the leisure, the culture that existed in the agrarian past of Washington and Lee. The social order of the old régime depended upon the cotton patch and the Negro field hand; the social order of the new régime will depend upon the industrial plant and the Anglo-Saxon mill

hand. The adjustment of a people to industrial pursuits who have long been identified with agricultural pursuits is certain, however, to be accompanied by far-reaching social changes.

One does not doubt that the South is possessed of the natural resources and the labor supply to bring the new economic order to realization. In natural resources it has a wealth of coal, iron, limestone, lumber, farm materials and water power. The South, specifically, is lavishly blessed with fifty-six of the sixty-four outstanding minerals listed by the United States geological survey, and in the production of forty-one of these minerals it is the leading State or the next to the leading State. The present forest area of the Southern States is four times the entire land surface of the six New England States. The State of Alabama, alone, has a coal area equal to that of England, and Alabama iron ores and limestone, too, are practically inexhaustible for generations to come. The water-shed of the Blue Ridge region offers the South a possibility for the development of hydroelectric power unequaled elsewhere in the nation. Its farm materials comprise one-third of the agricultural products of the entire United States.

The United States census of 1920 shows that the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas have less than 1 per cent foreign-born whites in their total population; and that Virginia, Florida, Louisiana and Kentucky have but from 1 to 5 per cent. Here, indeed, is Anglo-Saxon stock. These people have despaired of farming, and are deserting the countryside for industrial employment. They are tractable, unorganized; they speak a common tongue. The industrial workers of the North are much less tractable, much more highly organized; they do not speak a common tongue, for placards in fifteen different languages have been posted in a single Massachusetts mill. In addition to raw materials and labor supply, the South offers an equable climate which permits of building costs lower by 20 per cent than those of the North, and a less expensive standard of living for industrial employes. Its geographic position places it in close proximity to the markets of Central and South America.

One does not question the activity of the South in calling attention to its industrial advantages. The city of Macon, Ga., for instance, advertising itself as the hub of a "millionarea," had in the Summer of 1928 over 100 Northern firms inquiring into manufacturing conditions in its district. Many Southern communities are offering monetary inducements to new enterprises; the several Southern Legislatures, too, are vying one with another in presenting income and inheritance tax exemptions to the capital of the world. Southern college professors, yielding to generous proffers from industrial leaders, are deserting their classrooms to preach the advantages of the new dispensation to slowly awakening communities. Southern newspaper editors, moreover, are announcing the arrival of the new dispensation in headlines and in special editions—the coming of the textile factory, the rolling mill, the paper mill, the milk condensery, the hydroelectric plant.

All this activity, one observes, is evidenced in the growing industrialization of the South. Already the centre of cotton manufacturing has shifted from New England to the States of the ex-Confederacy; the consumption of cotton in Southern mills is now well over half the total consumed in America; 90 per cent of the new cotton mills or additions are being located in the South. While the government has dallied with Muscle Shoals, an industrial zone of vast potentialities, Tennessee hydroelectric development centring around Chattanooga has designated that region as the Ruhr of America, and Southern hydroelectric development has interwoven the power lines of the Caro-

linas, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee into an efficient unit to eliminate sectional drought hazards. The city of Birmingham, which has sprung to life within the memory of living men, is now referred to as the Pittsburgh of the South, and economists state that the Birmingham district has greater possibilities for intensive industrialization than any other sector in the world. The South, in fact, is rapidly becoming industrial; its manufactured products are yearly reckoned at $10,000,000,000; they exceed the value of its farm products by $4,000,000,000.

After the war between the States, when the blight of the Reconstruction era settled down upon his devastated land, the Southerner dreamed of a happier civilization that had passed from his midst, and in the resignation of his dreams he magnified the virtues of the old régime. Now that the machine has come to his rejuvenated land and the era of material expansion is upon him, he is dreaming again, and in the exuberance of his dreams he is magnifying the virtues of the new régime. But he, like the editor of *The Edenton News,* is beginning to wake up to the fact that a specialized zeal for manufacturing is as dangerous as his formerly solitary devotion to the cultivation of cotton.

In the metamorphosis which is upon the South, the section is losing much which is characteristically Southern. The external evidences of the forfeiture are obvious; the archaic beauty and the lazy charm of the Old South are no more. As a striking example of the physical changes which come over a community eager to achieve the progressive industrial ideal, consider Tuscaloosa, on the edge of the Birmingham industrial zone in Alabama. The city is one of the oldest settlements in the Commonwealth; the crumbling walls of the State House mark the spot where the Capitol once stood; a few fine old Colonial mansions are still to be found about the town and at the University of Alabama, which was razed by Federal troops during the war between the States. The mocking bird sings in the magnolia trees on its once spacious lawns; the wistaria climbs over the servant shacks in its back yards. At evening, when the twilight closes down upon the town, and the steamboat moans on the Warrior River, the Negro washerwoman walks through the streets with a basket of white clothes atop her black head as did her mammy a generation ago.

Here and there, one discovers these relics of a quiet residential community, for the city now has become a thriving centre, "where industry, education and agriculture meet." The list of its industries includes a steel mill, a hosiery mill, a lumber mill and a milk condensery. The city also has a Liggett drug store, a Montgomery Ward store, a J. C. Penney store, a Kress, a Woolworth, a string of Piggly-Wiggly groceries, coffee pot restaurants, Tom Thumb golf courses, and Drive-it-yourself garages. In 1920 the population of Tuscaloosa was 11,000; now it is 26,000, recruited largely from the countryside. Its energies have been directed to material expansion. In physical appearance it is not unlike any other progressive town of the conventional American pattern.

Tuscaloosa, it is said, was settled by aristocratic families of Virginia and the Carolinas who moved westward over a hundred years ago. Their descendants are a charming people who, to some extent, have not forgotten the best traditions of the South. Some few of them still have time to say grace before meat, to deliver Christmas presents in person and to linger over a good egg-nogg while they discuss their families. Some few of them still find time to cherish friendship, to cultivate hospitality, and to practice in all its nuances the unhurried art of living. Latterly, however, the tempo of life has quickened. At evening, after a strenuous day—and a strenuous day to a Southerner is indeed a strenuous day—the citizens of Tuscaloosa stop on the red

light and go on the green as they drive home in automobiles which they have purchased through the General Motors Acceptance Corporation. If they play bridge, they follow the conventions of the Knickerbocker Whist Club of New York. If they listen to a radio program, they hear bright young Jews in Tin-Pan Alley croon songs to them about their Mammy Belt. If they read a newspaper, it is replete with syndicated columns by Dr. Cadman, Arthur Brisbane, O. O. McIntyre and Dorothy Dix. If they sit at open windows in their new apartments, the soft Southern breeze brings odors to them from the paper mill to which they subscribed a handsome bonus—odors as rank as any from the glue works in Cincinnati or from the carnal industries in Chicago.

In contrast to the bustling activity of the Southern industrial town is the passive decadence of its countryside. Everywhere one sees unfenced acres lying abandoned to sun and rain. In North Carolina, in the five years 1920-25, the land in farms decreased 1,500,000 acres; in South Carolina during the same period, farm lands decreased nearly 2,000,000 acres. In many Southern communities what appears to be a gain in population is really not an increase at all, but simply a shifting of people from the country to the town. That the industrialization of the South is responsible in part for this transplanting of people there can be no doubt. The farmer of Anglo-Saxon stock has found it impossible to succeed in agriculture; consequently, he is ripe for industry. He is moving into town to work at the machine for $2 a day, because he finds it more profitable and pleasant than farming.

The landed aristocrat of the South, too, is yielding sway to the industrial baron. In Alabama, for instance, the political program of the State is shaped not in the capital of Montgomery, which is the centre of the agricultural belt, but in Birmingham, which is the centre of the State's industrial expansion. Many advocates of the new economic order assert that the landed aristocrat is the greatest single obstacle to a well-balanced progress which the South affords. They point to the State of North Carolina, which lies between the commonwealths of Virginia and South Carolina and which has often been called "the valley of humiliation between two hills of conceit," and they aver that the absence of an established aristocracy there has made it possible for North Carolina to become the most progressive of Southern States.

Slowly dawning upon the South is the realization that it is paying a heavy price for industrialization. The uneconomic principle of offering monetary awards and tax exemptions where industrial advantages already prevail, the exploitation of its workers of Anglo-Saxon stock, the decadence of its agriculture, the passing of its landed aristocracy, the forfeiture of its archaic beauty and its unhurried charm—these are the sacrifices which have been made to attract the machine to the South. One fears, too, that they will continue to be made, for the South, although it is beginning to appreciate the extent of its sacrifices, is almost solidly resolved to bring its program of industrial expansion to thorough realization. Yet if these sacrifices continue to go unchecked, the results of industrialization undoubtedly will prove as unhappy to the South as the editor of *The Edenton News* found them to be to Edenton.

The surest method that the South can employ to correct the worst features of its industrialization is to develop the resources of the masses of its people, the representative farmer-stock from which Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln came. The resources of these people can best find expression through education and through diversified farming. It is encouraging to find that in a period of six years the sum of $300,-

000,000 (exclusive of levies by counties and municipalities) was appropriated by Southern States alone for purposes of education. Again, it is encouraging to find that in a span of six years the South has appropriated $1,000,000,000 for the construction of good roads; and that the six States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee, working in connection with the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, have recommended for purposes of diversified farming tracts of land which vary in size from 5,000 acres in North Carolina to 25,000 acres in Alabama.

A possible remedy, too, for the worst features of industrialization lies in a traditional characteristic of the Southerner himself. He has never been wholly devoted to the strenuous life which has the accumulation of business profits as its sole objective. The love of good living and the love of leisure are in fact so deeply rooted in the South that its people may never submit to the quickened tempo of activity which the machine in other quarters of America has invariably exacted as its toll. If the South can conquer the machine by placing it in its proper niche in the plan of life, it will have succeeded where other quarters of America have failed and it will have restored to America a delicate and vanishing art—the art of living life itself.